

Analysis of the Current Status and Improvement Path of Labor Education in the New Era

Yixuan Tao*. Yantong He and Zhipeng Lin

School of Marxism, Guangdong University of Education, Guangzhou City, 510800, Guangdong Province, China
Email: 490561452@qq.com

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Abstract

Labor, as an essential attribute of humanity, is the foundation of social development and the sole source of value creation. Hard work is a traditional virtue of the Chinese nation, and labor education plays an irreplaceable role in talent cultivation. In the new era, the Party and the state have proposed the talent cultivation goal of "developing all five aspects simultaneously" which are the Integration of Moral, Intellectual, Physical, Aesthetic and Labor Education. While labor education has attracted the attention of many teachers and students, part of students still experience resistance to labor and a lack of understanding of labor. Marxist labor values have yet to be fully established, and the unique educational value of labor education has yet to be fully appreciated. These practical difficulties not only restrict the improvement of students' labor literacy but also affect their all-round development. To enable students to adapt to the development needs of the new era, it is necessary to enhance their labor literacy, combine the strengths of school, family, and society, and explore new paths to enhance labor education.

Keywords

Labor education; New era; Marxist view of labor

1. Introduction

Cultivating socialist builders and successors who are well-rounded in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor development is the Party's educational policy. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized at the National Education Conference: "We must promote the spirit of labor among students, educate and guide them to value and respect labor, understand that labor is the most glorious, noble, greatest, and beautiful thing, and be able to work diligently, honestly, and creatively when they grow up." Labor education directly determines students' labor spirit, labor value orientation, and labor skill level, providing theoretical and practical support for the development of "big ideological and political courses." Since the new era, schools have increasingly emphasized labor education for students, achieving certain results.

However, with the continuous development of the market economy, the impact of diverse values brought about by multiculturalism and consumerism has led some students to value material enjoyment and abhor participation in labor, fantasizing about so-called "overnight wealth" and "windfalls." "Lying flat" and "slack off" have become buzzwords, and some students even hope to achieve their personal ideals through prayers, burning incense, and making wishes. Therefore, how to improve the effectiveness of labor education, help students establish Marxist labor values, and enable them to become comprehensively developed new people of the era is an important issue worthy of study.

2. Theoretical Origins and Practical Basis of Labor Education in the New Era

In the historical process of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, young students shoulder the heavy responsibility of our times. They have an immense stage to showcase their talents and an incredibly bright future to realize their dreams. At the same time, we must also recognize that happiness is achieved through hard work: "Happiness does not come by chance; a good life is created through hard work." Whether it is the realization of the Chinese Dream or one's own lofty ideals, they will never be achieved without honest labor. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen labor education, promote the virtues of labor, instill Marxist labor values in students, and effectively improve their labor awareness and skills. Strengthening labor education in the new era has both profound theoretical roots and a solid practical foundation, and is a crucial means of promoting the five-pronged development of education.

2.1. Theoretical Origins

2.1.1. Marxist Labor Theory of Value

Based on a critical inheritance of classical economic theory and grounded in practice, Marx constructed a scientific labor theory of value. He absorbed the rational core of William Petty's "labor is the father of wealth" and Adam Smith's "the value of a commodity is determined by the general labor employed in its production; labor is the source and measure of value," establishing the theory of the dual nature of labor and systematically expounding the law of value in commodity production. In *Capital*, Marx clearly stated: "Future education for all children, having reached a certain age, consists in the combination of productive labor with intellectual and physical education; it is not only a means of improving social production, but the only means of creating well-rounded men." He believed that labor is the key to realizing the communist ideal and cultivating well-rounded individuals, and that the combination of education and productive labor is the fundamental principle of socialist education. Young people must be guided to deeply understand the scientific implications of Marxist labor theory of value. Engels also believed that labor "is the first and fun-

damental condition of all human life, so much so that we are compelled to say, in a certain sense, that labor creates man himself." Humans are the product of the long-term development of nature, children of nature. In the process of evolution, it is labor that distinguishes humans from animals. Labor enabled apes to develop upright gait and the division of labor between their hands and feet, which in turn drove systemic changes in their body structure, language skills, and brain development. Marxist value theory is a monistic theory based on the notion that labor creates value. It represents the culmination of thousands of years of human exploration and understanding of commodity economic theory, and serves as the core ideological source guiding labor education. Its revelation of the essence and laws of commodity economy holds irreplaceable theoretical value.

2.1.2. General Secretary Xi Jinping's Important Remarks on Labor Education

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has attached great importance to labor and labor education, making a series of important statements on this topic at major conferences and in speeches. In the great practice of realizing the Chinese Dream, Xi Jinping has scientifically expounded on the profound connection between labor and dreams, pointing out that labor is the source of both wealth and happiness. He emphasizes that personal aspirations can only be realized through labor; that the various challenges of social development can only be solved through labor; and that all the glory in life can only be forged through labor. General Secretary Xi Jinping advocates a view of happiness through struggle, emphasizing that "happiness is achieved through struggle, and struggle itself is a form of happiness." Education is the foundation of a nation's major plans. General Secretary Xi Jinping attaches great importance to labor education for students. He has repeatedly advocated a Marxist view of labor, emphasizing that socialism is built through hard work, and so is the new era. He emphasized that "we must carry out propaganda and education with the theme of creating happiness through labor, incorporate labor education into the entire process of talent cultivation, and integrate it into all stages of universities, colleges, and primary and secondary schools, as well as all aspects of family, school, and society. We must educate and guide young people to establish a labor concept that is proud of hard work and ashamed of laziness, and cultivate generations of high-quality workers who love labor, are diligent in labor, and are good at labor." General Secretary Xi Jinping's important expositions on labor education not only opened up a new realm for Marxist labor education and developed Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, but also provided great practical guidance for cultivating new people of the era, promoting the construction of "big ideological and political courses," and realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

2.2. Realistic Basis

2.2.1. Labor education is the only way to cultivate morality and build people

In his report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the need to "fully implement the Party's educational policy, fulfill the fundamental task of cultivating moral character and educating people, and cultivate socialist builders and successors who are well-rounded in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor development." The importance of labor education has been reaffirmed. This not only enriches and develops the Party's educational policy, but also reflects a reflection on and response to the current problem of prioritizing intellectual education over labor. In today's world, international competition increasingly focuses on scientific and technological innovation and talent cultivation. Cultivating innovative talent and high-quality workers has become the primary goal of education in all countries. Whether my country's demographic advantage can be transformed into a powerful driving force for development depends on education. Labor education can help students establish Marxist labor values, cultivate a hardworking and enterprising character, and leverage my country's advantages of a large educational scale and a large population base. In the face of some impetuous and labor-contempt phenomena and the so-called "theory of the uselessness of effort" that have emerged in the current society, strengthening labor education in schools, families, and society can correct students' labor attitudes, form a good atmosphere of respecting labor and striving bravely, help students consciously resist the bad trend of getting something for nothing, encourage students to get education through labor, learn to work through education, adapt personal ideals to the development of the country and society, and find the best balance between national needs, personal development, and professional matching.

2.2.2. Labor Education is an Important Part of The Five-pronged Education

Labor education is both a goal and a means. It coordinates with moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic education as a whole, forming a "five-pronged education" framework and promoting the goal of cultivating talents for the Party and the country. Furthermore, through its methodological characteristics, it coordinates and deeply integrates with moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic education, forming a virtuous cycle. As part of a comprehensive education system, labor education holds unique value in cultivating the nation's moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic qualities, irreplaceable by the other four aspects of development: moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic. As builders and successors of socialism, Chinese youth should possess basic labor skills and a correct understanding of labor, identifying with the values of labor and a positive attitude towards life. Empty talk ruins a nation, while practical work makes it prosperous. The Marxist view of labor emphasizes that all human functions, including thinking, practical, and aesthetic abilities,

are continuously developed through labor. A person who is lazy and ignorant of the five grains is destined to struggle to withstand life's setbacks and obstacles, just like a flower in a greenhouse that cannot withstand the elements. Labor not only strengthens the body and mind but also strengthens the will. The new era requires universities, colleges, and primary and secondary schools to implement the "five-pronged education" policy. It also requires labor education to develop its own educational system to address shortcomings in the talent development system. This effectively lays a solid foundation for labor education to fully realize its comprehensive educational value of cultivating virtue, enhancing intelligence, strengthening the body, and cultivating aesthetics. The deeper reason for emphasizing "five-pronged education" is to promote the "integration of the five educations" and advance the fundamental task of cultivating morality and cultivating people. Labor education should not only leverage the power of schools to vigorously carry out corresponding educational and teaching practices, but also fully mobilize the power of society and families to ensure comprehensive labor education for students and strengthen comprehensive implementation.

3. The Current Situation and Problems of Labor Education in the New Era

In recent years, thanks to the attention of the government and relevant educators, labor education has ushered in favorable development opportunities and achieved certain results, with more and more people realizing the importance of labor. However, for a long time, labor education has been downplayed and weakened. In actual educational and teaching processes, it has failed to fully play its due role and highlight its unique value. Therefore, we must deeply analyze its current predicament and examine its core issues through phenomenal research to explore solutions.

3.1. Current Status of Labor Education in Schools

3.1.1. Insufficient Attention on Labor Education

Although schools have gradually increased their emphasis on labor education as a compulsory course since it became an independent course in the fall of 2022, the actual talent development process still emphasizes intellectual development over labor education, and labor education has yet to achieve its desired results. A study shows that only 16.4% of students believe that their school conducts some form of labor education; 67.8% of students point out that their school does not include labor education in the credit system, but includes it in the overall quality evaluation and is a reference for scholarship evaluation; 20.7% of students believe that their school organizes some form of public area cleaning and dormitory hygiene rating activities, but does not include them in any form of student scholarship evaluation or other award activities.

On the one hand, the independent status of labor education remains to be established. Most schools have yet to develop clear educational programs and implementation plans, nor have they made specific requirements for cultivating students' labor literacy. Labor education is sometimes generalized to encompass social practice, and sometimes narrowed down to encompass technical education, vocational education, and so on. In actual teaching, labor education is often "hidden" within the framework of moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic education, lacking independence. On the other hand, school investment in labor education is relatively insufficient. This is reflected in the lack of hardware and software infrastructure for labor education, which often results in labor education becoming a formality and lacking substantive educational impact. First, most schools lack full-time teachers with a solid theoretical foundation and professional teaching methods, relying solely on part-time teaching by teachers from other disciplines or individuals with certain labor skills, which hinders educational effectiveness. Second, supporting facilities for labor education are inadequate. Currently, most schools have very limited investment in supporting facilities for labor education, and lack both space and funding. This demonstrates that the importance of labor education in the minds of teachers and students differs significantly from that of traditional intellectual education, and that labor education is still insufficiently accorded the status and attention it deserves.

3.1.2. The Value of Labor Education Lost

The core value of labor education lies in promoting the all-round development of individuals through practical labor. However, in its implementation, its value orientation often falls into a narrow misunderstanding, with educational methods and objectives deviating from its original intention and essence. On the one hand, some schools overemphasize the economic value of labor education, adopting a utilitarian approach and even treating students as free labor. For some schools, labor education simply involves organizing students to participate in agricultural work in the fields. They focus more on the results of their work—whether they have completed their assigned tasks—than on the actual labor process, neglecting the educational value of the labor process. On the other hand, some schools have a misguided approach to labor education, relying solely on short-term extracurricular activities with simple content. Students often participate out of curiosity and novelty, lacking sustainability and depth. Such brief, simple, and even entertainment-oriented labor education has no positive impact on the development of students' labor literacy and may even weaken their sense of responsibility and accomplishment, fostering a tendency to despise labor and making it difficult to cultivate a positive attitude towards work.

3.1.3. Labor Education Content is Empty

As social development in the new era presents new trends and student groups exhibit new characteristics, labor education should also keep pace with the times, highlighting new connotations and conveying new missions. The times place higher demands on students' labor concepts, attitudes, qualities, and spirit, but these demands are not yet effectively reflected in labor education. Currently, labor education lacks a distinct system and is often superficially explored and glossed over, lacking systematic, in-depth study and practice. Survey results indicate that the proportion of schools offering production labor is low, and the professional content is low. Only 10.4% of university students indicated that their schools offered some form of production labor education, including manual, agricultural, and industrial production labor, primarily covering basic agricultural cultivation, industrial production, and handicrafts. This lack of a significant improvement in level compared to similar activities offered in primary and secondary schools also significantly reduces the number of off-campus labor activities. Labor education suffers from overly monotonous and fragmented content, failing to reflect the times, advancements, and relevance of the subject. When implementing labor education, some schools primarily focus on physical, low-level, and repetitive labor, with low expectations for students' understanding and ability to work. This lacks focus and fails to emphasize the core mission of labor education in the new era: cultivating labor values. For example, some schools simply include production labor, public welfare labor, household chores, internships, experiments, and even labor knowledge and hands-on work in professional courses within the scope of labor education. However, in practice, these elements lack a clear educational orientation and are not closely connected or integrated, resulting in fragmented content and a lack of tangible student impact.

3.2. Issues of Labor Education in the New Era

3.2.1. Marxist Labor Values Have Not Yet Been Established

China has long cherished the traditional virtue of diligence. However, due to millennia of feudal oppression of laborers and backward productivity, mainstream ancient culture often portrayed labor as arduous, with phrases like "hoeing the field at noon, sweat dripping to the soil" and "rising early to clear the wasteland, returning home under the moonlight, carrying the hoe." Furthermore, there was a tendency to disparage physical labor and those who labored, with sayings like "All things are inferior, only reading is superior" and "Those who labor with their minds rule others, those who labor with their hands are ruled by others." In ancient China, education and productive labor were separate and opposed to each other. Even the purpose of studying was to escape manual labor and pursue a career in government. Even today, after the reform and opening up, many people, influenced by the feudal culture's disparity in labor, are accustomed to contrasting manual and intellectual labor, believing that farmers, factory workers, and cleaners are low-class workers,

while only office workers and civil servants are considered high-class workers. In addition to the influence of traditional culture, current social trends such as consumerism, materialism, and hedonism are having a significant impact on young people's views on labor and values. Consumerism amplifies people's material desires and desires, viewing consumption as enjoyable and respectable. It measures a person's worth by consumption, advocating for self-respect and confidence through high consumption. Hedonism, often associated with individualism and materialism, emphasizes the pursuit of happiness as the ultimate goal of life, instilling the idea that material possessions and money bring happiness, while labor only causes suffering. These social trends tend to devalue labor and worship money. Marxist values of labor, however, are diametrically opposed to the feudal view of labor and the social trends of the commodity economy. Marx believed that labor is an essential attribute of the human being and the sole source of value. However, Marxist values of labor have yet to be established among students.

3.2.2. The Labor Education System and Mechanism Are Not Perfect

Schools are the primary force in nurturing individuals with well-rounded moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor development. However, many schools' labor education systems and mechanisms are still imperfect. They lack dedicated, systematic labor education courses and established robust assessment mechanisms. In most schools, labor education content is still scattered across other courses and activities. For example, education on labor values is primarily taught in ideological and political education courses, while education on labor skills is primarily delivered through social practice activities. Most schools lack dedicated and full-time labor education teachers and have yet to establish independent, theoretically robust labor education courses, making them unable to meet the needs of labor education development in the new era. Furthermore, the incomplete coordination mechanisms for student labor education have prevented the development and utilization of many potential labor education resources in social life. Education is truly pervasive in life, but the most profound labor education can only be gained through authentic, living situations. Only by stepping out of the protective confines of the "ivory tower" and into the real world, allowing students to engage closely with ordinary workers and experience the authentic working conditions, can their resolve be tempered. On the other hand, the lack of a scientific and feasible assessment mechanism has weakened the momentum for the development of labor education, making it difficult to truly reflect the new requirements and missions set by the Party and the state in the new era. Currently, my country's talent development system lacks appropriate standards and assessments for students' labor literacy. The lack of evaluation standards for labor education has led to a general lack of attention and focus among teachers and students. Consequently, it has been difficult for labor education to become standardized and systematized.

4. Analysis of The Path to Improving Labor Education

To address the aforementioned current situation and challenges, the key to reversing the weakening and downplaying of labor education lies in integrating it into the entire talent development process. This requires, first, transforming traditional concepts so that teachers and students fully understand the practical significance of labor education; second, integrating resources and innovating the forms and methods of labor education. First, we must establish a Marxist perspective on labor through ideological understanding; second, we must vigorously dispel biases about labor and occupations; and finally, through practical action, we must guide students to actively participate in labor practices.

4.1. Establish the Marxist View of Labor

Labor is the most glorious, the noblest, the greatest, and the most beautiful. This isn't just a slogan; it should be deeply rooted in the hearts of the people and become a consensus across society. The state should foster a strong atmosphere of respect for labor, foster a social ethos that values the glory of labor, and help students cultivate Marxist labor values. Students should be encouraged to pay attention to the lives of ordinary workers and tell their stories well. The deeds of model workers should be publicized among students. Model workers are national heroes and contributors to the Republic, but they are not high-ranking idols; they come from ordinary working people. Historical materialism teaches us that greatness comes from the ordinary, and heroes emerge from the people. The development of the country and the rejuvenation of the nation cannot be separated from the builders of socialism and the broad working class. In our country, workers should be respected, and everyone can shine in their respective roles. Schools should shoulder the responsibility of instilling Marxist labor values in young students, fostering a culture of respect for labor and cherishing its fruits on campus. Students should be encouraged to discover and cultivate model workers around them, and participate in various forms of labor activities, internalizing and applying the Marxist view of labor. The state should encourage and support literary and artistic creators to create more outstanding works that celebrate ordinary workers, promote a socialist outlook on labor with Chinese characteristics, and uphold the spirit of labor. General Secretary Xi Jinping once stated that "literature and art are the project of forging souls," and that excellent literary and artistic works can inspire, move, and motivate people. For example, Guangdong Satellite TV launched an original music and cultural program called "Labor Songs." This program collects and innovatively interprets labor songs from different ethnic groups, regions, and historical periods, showcasing the spirit of workers from different eras, paying tribute to generations of simple yet great workers, and promoting the spirit of hard work in the new era.

4.2. Vigorously Eliminate Labor Prejudice

In today's highly developed internet world, many young people are influenced by negative online trends, such as hedonism, materialism, and consumerism. They yearn for a luxurious material life, value consumption, and abhor physical labor. Some students and parents, influenced by traditional mindsets, view various professions through a tinted lens, only advocating for so-called "respectable" and "glamorous" jobs and categorizing them into different levels. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized, "There is no distinction between high and low labor; every profession is honorable. The broad masses of working people should work honestly in their own positions. No matter what kind of labor they engage in, they should be dedicated, passionate, and dedicated." The traditional Chinese concept of "there are 360 professions, and every profession has its top talent" remains relevant today. Whether it's physical or mental labor, and regardless of the industry, as long as it's a legitimate occupation and contributes to the country and society, it should be respected. Therefore, when students are seeking employment and starting their own businesses, we should guide them to vigorously overcome labor biases and occupational discrimination, and help them develop a correct perspective on work and career choice. The cultural environment and living atmosphere on campus are invisible resources for labor education. Schools can make full use of public spaces on campus, such as posting posters and slogans promoting labor, and playing excellent new-era labor-themed documentaries such as "Master Craftsmen" and "Innovative China" on public screens. They can also use platforms such as campus WeChat public accounts to publicize the stories of the most beautiful workers on campus, collect labor moments of teachers and students inside and outside the school, and so on, to eliminate discrimination against physical labor and specific occupations from a cognitive level.

4.3. Encourage Students to Actively Participate in Practice

Knowledge gained from books is shallow; true understanding requires personal experience. In this age of information explosion, students can learn a wealth of labor theory through various channels. However, theory is only theory; if it is not translated into practice, it lacks the power to transform the world. Only through personal participation in labor practice can students uncover the veil of labor and appreciate its true meaning. Labor is a product of practice. Schools and families should encourage students to participate in labor practice, provide more material support and spiritual encouragement, and create more practical opportunities such as cooking, planting, and housework, so that students can gain a profound understanding of labor in real life. Schools can organize labor education activities on holidays such as Labor Day, Arbor Day, and National Day, such as labor skills competitions, essay competitions on the spirit of labor, and short video competitions featuring "The Most Beautiful Workers Around Us." They can also invite model workers, inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, and outstanding craftsmen to give special lectures.

When organizing student social practice activities during summer or winter vacations, labor research and practical experience can be included as a theme. On the one hand, support students in conducting research on nearby workers, emerging industries, and new types of labor, and writing research reports to help them gain a deeper understanding of the demands placed on workers in different occupations and positions, and to appreciate the trends in labor development in the new era. On the other hand, encourage students to provide voluntary service to their communities and cities, thereby cultivating good labor habits and strengthening their sense of social responsibility. Schools, families, and society should work together to create a labor education environment rich with practical opportunities and growth opportunities for students, making labor an important path for student growth.

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